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ABSTRACT

This report describes the background and plans for an alternative education program to reduce the high dropout rate at Baldwyn High School in Baldwyn, Mississippi. Research shows that students drop out primarily because they are behind grade level and are older than their classmates. Of Baldwyn High School's approximately 290 students, between 25 and 30 were identified as needing an alternative education program. Almost 60 percent of these latter students are black in comparison to a black enrollment of 38 percent. Most come from families with incomes below the poverty level. The program's objectives are to serve approximately 25 at-risk students each year and to counsel them to complete school. Students will be directed toward vocational training and/or employment opportunities; cooperation from local businesses and junior colleges will be sought. The project's initial phase will include a comprehensive selection process. Selection and enrollment require consent of the student, parents, and counselors. Students seeking a diploma will receive remedial instruction and tutoring; those seeking the GED certificate will receive basic education classes. One full-time instructor will help determine those students in need of remedial education, administer tests, teach five basic areas, and evaluate progress. The school guidance counselor will assist in review and referral. The program should operate on a 12-month schedule in order to maintain students' work toward GED completion and to provide remedial assistance. (CJM)

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DROPOUT PREVENTION MODEL

Baldwyn High School
Baldwyn, Mississippi

LaRane P. Dillinger

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The Baldwyn Municipal School District, Baldwyn, Mississippi, has determined that an alternative education program is needed to address the area's high dropout rate.

The Baldwyn Municipal School District is located on the Prentiss County, Mississippi, and Lee County, Mississippi, border, serving residents in a four (4) square mile incorporated area. The Baldwyn School District has an enrollment of approximately one thousand students. Minority enrollment represents 38% of the student body. Of this number, approximately 290 students are enrolled in grades nine through twelve.

These students come from predominately rural backgrounds, with agriculture and factory work being the predominant occupations. Unemployment in Prentiss and Lee counties is 8.9% and 8.2%, respectively (September, 1985, figures, Mississippi Employment Security Commission). Sixty-four percent (64%) of the student population is in the subsidized lunch program, with 54% receiving free lunches.

Baldwyn's dropout statics for the past six years are detailed in the following table.

	Middle School					High School				
	5	6	7	8	Total	9	10	11	12	Total
1979-80	2	3	4	4	13	4	6		2	12
1980-81			4	4	8	6	8	2	1	17
1981-82	1	2	4	2	9	2	7	3	2	14
1982-83	1		6	1	8	3	10	6	2	24*
1983-84			4		4	5	12	7	6	30
1984-85			11		11	4	5	8	5	22

	Middle School Total	High School Total	School Total
1979-80	13	12	25
1980-81	8	17	25
1981-82	9	14	23
1982-83	8	24*	32
1983-84	4	30	34
1984-85	11	22	33

*In 1982-83, three high school dropouts were classified only as "Special Education" and not by grade level.

A recent study conducted by the Research Triangle Institute Center for Education Studies, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, for the Appalacian Regional Commission states that 31.2% of Mississippi's population between the ages of 18 and 24 are school dropouts (1980 census information) and that 36.6% of the 1978-79 seventh grade enrollment has left school without completing requirements for graduation.

A recent article in The Daily Journal, Tupelo, Mississippi, predicted that about half of all first grade students who enrolled in Mississippi's public schools this year would leave without receiving a diploma. This estimate seems to hold true for the Baldwyn School District when an actual count was made tracing the 1984-85 graduating class from the first through the twelfth grades.

In May, 1985, forty (40) students graduated from Baldwyn High School. Of this number, twelve received special education certificates and twenty-eight received diplomas.

When the 1985 graduating class entered school in 1972, there were 96 students in the first grade. In 1978, when the class entered the sixth grade, enrollment was at 93. However, in 1979, the seventh grade class had increased in number to 102 students.

Twenty-seven members of the 1972 first grade class and an additional thirteen members of the 1979 seventh grade class have been identified as having quit school since entering the ninth grade. This number--which does not include students who dropped out before entering the ninth grade or who may have left during the summer months--is exactly equal to the number of 1985 regular and special education graduates.

When implemented, Baldwyn's alternative education program will serve students who are between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one, are enrolled in the public school system, and are behind grade level or in need or remedial help.

During the 1983-84 school year, 11,709 students dropped out of the public schools in Mississippi. Of this number, 87% (or 10,215 students) dropped out of the seventh through the twelfth grades. Research studies show that two of the major reasons students drop out of school are because they are one or more years behind in grade level and two or more years older than classmates. A recent study of high school dropouts in the Appalachian area revealed that 59% of all dropouts left school because of poor academic achievement and related reasons while 14% left for financial reasons and 9% left because of marriage and pregnancy.

A preliminary screening of cummulative records at Baldwyn High School indicates that between fifty and sixty students would meet the basic criteria for the alternative education program (in-school youth between the ages of 16 and 21 who are behind grade level) but this number is reduced by approximately half when

current progress reports and student interviews are evaluated. However, between twenty-five and thirty students can still be identified as being currently in need of an alternative education program. This number can be almost evenly divided between males and females. However, almost 60% are black in comparison to a black school enrollment of 38%. Approximatly 75% would have a family income of below proverty level (based on participation in the subsidized school lunch program). About 35% live in two-parent homes, 45% live with one parent, and 20% live with neither parent.

The objectives of the alternative education program are quite simple. They are:

* to identify potential at-risk students who are failing in the school system,
* to counsel at-risk students to remain in school,
* to offer remedial instruction to help improve basic skills and tutorial help with present academic subjects to students seeking a regular high school diploma,
* to offer basic education classes to students seeking the GED certificate and improve their basic skills to a level where they can successfully complete the GED exam,
* to seek assistance from local business leaders in developing a training course in employability skills to help the students obtain and maintain employment,
* to cooperate with local junior colleges in interesting students in future vocational training, and
* to substantially reduce the dropout rate in the Baldwyn School District.

The initial phase of the project will include a comprehensive selection process.

* All student records will be screened at least twice a year to determine students who are behind grade level or students lacking graduation requirements.

- Grade sheets will be examined at the end of each grading period and failing grades will be noted.
- Students who are two or more years behind grade level will be interviewed.
- Students who are one year behind grade level and failing currently will be interviewed.
- Students on grade level but currently failing multiple subjects will be referred for counseling.
- Any student interested in entering the alternative education program must be counseled at least twice and must sign a consent form.
- Parents or guardians of potential students must also be interviewed at least once and must sign consent forms for their child to enter the program.
- Selection and enrollment will be pending consent of the student, parents, and counselors. Only students who appear to be unable to succeed in the regular school system will be enrolled.

Once a student has elected to enter the alternative education program and has the consent of parents and school counselors, he/she will be tested to determine areas of academic weakness and an individualized plan of study will be implemented.

- Students will be pre-tested on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and other appropriate tests to determine areas of academic weaknesses.
- Individual instruction will be given in the areas of mathematics, writing, reading, science, and social studies.
- Individuals who are 17 years of age or older and who elect to take the GED exam will be given post-tests to indicate their probability of passing the GED test.
- The participants who plan to be mainstreamed into the regular high school system will improve skills in the five areas and increase their ability to meet minimum performance standards as required by Mississippi's Education Reform Act. They will also receive tutorial help with classroom assignments.
- Periodic testing will be given to determine progress with scores recorded and maintained on file.

- Conferences with regular classroom teachers will be held concerning the weaknesses of the participant. Files will be maintained on conferences with teachers concerning the participant.

Once a student who plans to take the GED exam has been tested with the TABE and weaknesses are indicated in one or more particular areas, he/she will receive individualized help so that he/she can take and successfully complete the GED examination. A student can be enrolled in a math skills class, a reading skills class, and a writing skills class. Enrollment in these classes may be concurrent or sequential. Class periods are fifty minutes in length and meet daily. A student will be allowed to begin GED testing only after a minimum enrollment in class of a period of two months and after having demonstrated sufficient skills in the GED classroom and on GED pre-tests.

Students enrolled in the alternative education program are included in all school activities and are eligible to participate in any academic class. Close association and interaction with peers is encouraged. Social development is a necessary component in life; and social skills and cooperation are necessary job skills.

Students who are seeking remedial help to pass regular courses will receive daily tutorial assistance with academic work. They will also be given remedial instruction in areas of basic weakness as are the GED students. Most remedial students will attend alternative classes for only one class period per day. This is because of the demands of their regular academic work. However, if deemed necessary, students will be enrolled in multiple alternative education classes.

A brief discription of the course content of each skills areas follows.

The mathematics skills class provides a sequential review of place value, addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division of whole numbers and decimals. Since most students possess the basic calculation skills, whole numbers and decimals can be taught simultaneously once students develop a clear understanding of place value. Reasoning skills are stressed. The students are taught how to read "word problems," isolate necessary information, and determine steps needed to solve the problem. Students are reintroduced to fractions. They are taught first what fractions are and how they can determine common demonators. Then the students are instructed how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide fractions and mixed numbers. Students are taught to convert fractions to decimals or to convert decimals to fractions. Next, the students begin a study of percentage. They learn about ratio and proportion and how to read tables and graphs. They work with measurements of time, weight, lenght, and capacity. Students are introduced to or reviewed on exponents, geometric shapes, terms, and formulars, and the algebra concepts of positive and negative numbers and equations. Throughout the course, once calculation is mastered, reasoning skills are stressed. Work is totally individualized.

The purpose of the writing skills class to to teach students to recognize and write complete and grammatically correct sentences. The recognition and classification of sentences, capitalization, punctuation, parts of sentences, and correct usage of verbs and pronouns are among the writing skills stressed. Students are taught the rules of basic spelling. They are also taught the skills of proof reading. Group instruction is given in the writing class.

but adjustments for individual differences and ability levels are made.

The reading skills class helps prepare students for the social studies, science, and reading portions of the GED exam. Primarily, all three are tests for reading comprehension. Skills involved include finding key words, drawing conclusions, making inferences, finding facts, and understanding charts, maps, graphs, and diagrams. The reading class is basically a reading lab where group instruction is given followed by drills to improve comprehension. Students are given selected readings to improve basic knowledge in science and social studies. They are also given drills to improve their ability to follow written directions.

It is the goal of alternative education to substantially reduce the dropout rate at Baldwyn High School and to direct these students toward vocational training and/or local employment opportunities. It is anticipated that an alternative education department at Baldwyn High School will serve approximately twenty-five students each year. Of this number, it is believed that at least fifteen will seek the GED certificate and that approximately 80% of those seeking the certificate can complete the requirements within one year. It is also believed that the students seeking remedial help will be able to improve academic ability to a level where they can succeed in a regular classroom. It is projected that the 1983 dropout rate of 30 high school students will be reduced by at least fifty percent (50%).

The alternative education department will employ one full-time instructior. The instructor's duties are as follows:

- Screen all cumulative records and current grades to determine students in need of remedial education
- Counsel with all prospective students and parents
- Administer the TABE and other required tests
- Maintain student records and documentation
- Give instruction in the five basic areas of mathematics, writing, reading, social studies, and science
- Meet with teachers and guidance counselor to determine the progress of remedial students

The high school guidance counselor will also work with the alternative education department. Her duties are as follows:

- Counsel all students, reviewing all credits earned and noting all failures
- Refer all at-risk students to the alternative education department
- Review all student records at least once each year
- Review all student grades and counsel with parents concerning student failures

Basic needs for the alternative education department include consumable and non-consumable workbooks for the five basic areas of instruction and classroom instructional equipment and supplies. Instructional equipment and supplies needed include a typewriter, an overhead projector, a fire-proof file cabinet, and a regular file cabinet.

It is felt that the alternative education department should be funded for a period of twelve months. Many students remain in school until summer vaction but do not return the next fall. A summer alternative education program would keep potential drop-outs working toward completion of the GED certificate or would give remedial help to students lacking basic skills.